

The Public's HEALTH

The Rhode Island Department of Health

SUMMER 2005

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Walk the Rhode to Health and... see Rhode Island



Ever think about leading a healthier and more active life but don't want to deal with all the clubs, barbells and exercise equipment? How about walking for health? The Rhode To Health Coalition makes it easy and interesting.

The Coalition began in an effort to expand health promotion/disease prevention interventions for Healthy Rhode Island 2010. It includes members from the RI Department of Health and the 15 hospitals in Rhode Island. The group selected physical activity and nutrition as key priorities. These are also the first two Leading Health Indicators listed in *"A Healthier Rhode Island by 2010: A Plan for Action"*.

The Coalition recently launched a monthly walking program called, "Walk the Rhode to Health".

This program encourages more Rhode Islanders to take up walking as a safe, easy, convenient and low-to-no cost way to be physically active. A different hospital member of the coalition organizes each monthly walk and chooses its location. The walks—scheduled through December—take place in various settings around the state and encourage participants to explore the State through walking.

The August walk, sponsored by Memorial Hospital, began in Pawtucket's Slater Park and featured prizes donated by the Pawtucket Red Sox. The September walk is scheduled for Saturday, September 20, at 10:00 a.m. at the John Dionne Track on Cumberland Hill Road in Woonsocket. The Rehabilitation Hospital of Rhode Island and Landmark Hospital are hosting the event.

Catch a walk near you or stride along each month all around Rhode Island! Fall walks include:

- Sunday, 10/16/05, 8:00 a.m., hosted by The Miriam Hospital at The Miriam Hospital on Summit Avenue in Providence.
- Friday, 11/4/05, 12:00 a.m., hosted by Roger Williams Medical Center at Roger Williams Medical Center (Pleasant Valley Parkway) in Providence.
- Saturday, 12/3/05, 9:00 a.m., hosted by St. Joseph Hospital at Stephen Olney Park in North Providence.

If you have any questions regarding the Rhode To Health Program, please contact JoAnna Williams, Healthy Rhode Island 2010 Coordinator, at 222-7899.

HEALTH, URI Educate Private Well Owners

All those private-label, bottled waters on store shelves may lead people to think there is something special about having your own private well for drinking water. No chlorine taste. No city pipes. Unfortunately, a private well also means someone else isn't testing to make sure the water is safe to drink.

Ten percent of Rhode Islanders draw their drinking water from private wells. That means every well owner has to take steps to assure quality water. Taking care of a private well can be demanding. Most well owners need information on how to maintain the well, how to protect it against contamination, how to get it tested, and what to do if the tests indicate problems.

Working with the Home*A*Syst Program at the University of Rhode Island Cooperative Extension, the RI Department of Health developed educational materials and workshops to help private well owners protect and monitor their drinking water supply. The results include the following consumer resources:



Well owners have the opportunity to discuss specific water well problems with HEALTH and URI Cooperative Extension experts at regional workshops.

A series of 26 Factsheets on the most common drinking water problems— available in both hard copy and on-line at the URI Home*A*Syst site (see below).

- Five residential pollution prevention Factsheets including:
 - Household Hazardous Waste and Water Quality Protection

- Pet Waste and Water Quality Protection
- Shoreland Buffers and Water Quality Protection
- Water Conservation In and Around the Home
- What You Can Do About Nonpoint ("Multiple Sources") Pollution
- A Workshop on private well water protection, held five to eight times annually, covering such topics as:
 - How to site, construct and maintain a private well
 - Basics on surface and groundwater movement; and pathways of contamination

From September 2002 to June 2004, 18 workshops provided information for more than 760 people. Ten percent of the workshop participants received a follow-up survey. The results (33% return) indicate that participants are taking action to protect their private well:

- 54% tested their well water and inspected their wellhead
- 41% installed or maintained their treatment system
- 30% began inspecting their septic system (26% already did this)
- 37% began pumping their septic system (19% already did this)
- 12% stopped using fertilizers near the well (65% already did this)
- 8% stopped using pesticides around the well (79% already did this)
- 23% began taking materials to a household hazardous waste collection (46% already did this)
- 27% began using non-toxic household materials, (46% already did this)
- 29% began properly disposing of used motor oil (54% already did this)
- 71% shared the information learned at the workshop with others

For more information, contact the HEALTH Office of Drinking Water Quality at (401) 222-6867 or www.health.ri.gov/environment/dwq/index.php or the URI Cooperative Extension Home*A*Syst Program at (401) 874-5398 (www.uri.edu/ce/wq).

Birth Certificates made easy

If you were born in Rhode Island, do you know where your birth records are kept? Birth records are important documents and often needed to acquire health and life insurance for a newborn, travel documents, and if applicable, apply for state or federal aid and/or social security benefits. Currently the



records can be found in three places: the Department of Health on Capitol Hill, the City or Town Hall of the hospital where you were born and the City or Town Hall of your mother's residence at the time of your birth.

Someday soon, when the electronic hookups are completed between municipalities and state offices, parents of children born after Jan 1, 2005 will be able request their child's birth record at any city or town hall in the state. (Some births were electronically filed as early as 2003 but all hospitals officially went on line on January first.) Eventually the electronic records will extend back to include everyone born after 1940. All the information has been entered into the database but is undergoing verification. Rhode Island averages 12,000-15,000 births a year—that is almost a million records to be checked. And some of the older records are handwritten—in fancy scripts!

In 2000 the Office of Vital Records embarked on a long-range project to streamline processes for managing birth related records and those of other vital events through a state-funded, statewide electronic vital records system. The modular design provides the Office with the capacity to expand the system eventually to include marriage, fetal death and death.

The system, VR2000, will enable multiple facilities (the 7 birthing hospitals, the 39 cities and towns and the State Office of Vital Records) to access one centralized database securely housed at HEALTH using web-based technology. When state funding permits, Vital Records will add the other modules.

The Social Security Administration (SSA) provided funds for the digital scanning and electronic capture of the birth records for the 60+ years. SSA uses the VR 2000 database to verify Rhode Island birth certificates brought to their offices. This pilot program enables SSA to expedite retirement claims and reduce fraudulent claims processed at field offices in Rhode Island, New London and Boston. Social Security is expanding this successful pilot to Retirement Claim Center Offices throughout the United States.

To date VR2000 resulted in improved customer access to birth records. It also provides data to the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), the Rhode Island Newborn Developmental Risk Assessment (Level 1 Screening) and the Family Outreach Program (FOP). The FOP uses the information to schedule professional home visits to assist young mothers and their families in finding community-based services such as Early Intervention, Immunizations, WIC, RiteCare and Food Stamps.

Ultimately, the CDC and other grant-funding agencies (e.g., the March of Dimes) can use this information to support research and fund projects addressing healthy births and other important public health objectives.



RI Dept. of HEALTH

smokefree

R H O D E I S L A N D

Smokefree Workplaces draw few complaints

Rhode Island's habitual policy skeptics have a problem. Almost everyone complies with the new smokefree workplace legislation and business is good. Restaurant and bar tax receipts went up almost 20 percent.

Rhode Island workplaces, including bars and restaurants, went smokefree on March 1, 2005.

As predicted from the experience of other states, both employees and the public embraced and complied with the new law. The Department of Health (HEALTH) received 172 complaints through July 31, of which only 37 met the legal criteria for a signed complaint. The remaining 135 were anonymously written or verbal complaints. All the workplaces mentioned received an informational warning letter.

As expected, the number of complaints decreased with each passing month: 76 for March, 45 for April, 18 for both May and June and 13 for July. The most frequent complaint concerned smoking patrons (36%),

followed by smoking employees (23%), and smoke from the outdoor smoking area(s) entering the building (19%). Most of the complaints originated in the major metropolitan areas. Thirteen towns are complaint-free.

"I'm sure it has been difficult for some restaurant goers and some staff, but the vast majority of people, even smokers, are happy with the smokefree environment," reports William Dundulis, an environmental risk specialist at HEALTH who gathers the compliance data.

While HEALTH tracks complaints and is a partner with community-based agencies that go out and check the workplaces, it forwards information to the municipality for prosecution once a second signed written (formal) complaint has been received for a given facility.

Those who wish to register a complaint can download the Complaint Form from the HEALTH website: <http://www.health.ri.gov/tobacco> or call the Department of Health at 222-3293 for a copy.